

# My Pilgrimage of



Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever!  
Amen (2 Peter 3:18).<sup>[1]</sup>

Initially, my pilgrimage of faith may be described as “Gullible’s Travels,” not Gulliver’s Travels. I accepted what I was taught without question. I memorized verses from the Bible by the hundreds. In the early stages of my ministry, I did not understand that one might cite Scripture and, at the same time, fail to apply the text correctly in light of its historical background. In the beginning of my spiritual leadership, as preacher and teacher,<sup>[2]</sup> my instructor taught me to commit to memory Holy writ, not to analyze its context.<sup>[3]</sup> My first sermon,<sup>[4]</sup> “What Shall I Preach?,” was the dawning of my dogmatic, partisan, factional, biased, and sectarian views concerning other believers. Even though I quoted the Word of God verbatim; nevertheless, my application of the Word was not in harmony with the context. If anyone differed with my exposition of the Old and New Testament, he or she was anathema. In other words, for one to disagree with my sharpness meant that one did not have a clear insight into the truths of God. I knew all the answers, so I thought.

In order to describe My Pilgrimage of Faith, it is necessary to discuss the inner workings of my mind as I endeavored to walk in the ways of God. To do this, I will probe certain areas to give emphasis to my reasoning that led me out of my sectarian spirit. In my earlier ministry, I went to the Scriptures to prove what I already believed, but eventually, as a result of further studies, I went to the Word to see what it taught. This intense study is what got me into trouble with the one-cup and non-Sunday school fellowship that I associated with in the early stages of my ministry (1951-1972).

As a young boy, I listened to the Lone-Ranger and Tonto with excitement. Tonto, whose name means “dimwit,” seldom spoke, except for his meaningless phrase “kemo sabe.” He was seen as a projection of his white leader, and the Lone-Ranger never seemed to take the time to listen to him. Today, there is a type of the Lone-Ranger mentality with the teacher and his student. The teacher never takes time to listen to his “Tonto.” Tonto only projects his Bible teacher. Bible study is often done by the Lone-Ranger, even in private, in the same sort of meaningless company with Tonto. Tonto (student) looks to the Lone-Ranger (teacher), his hero of the faith, for the correct interpretation of the Scripture without questioning. To question is abomination. When I interrogated the status quo, the wrath of the one-cup and non-Sunday school fellowship dealt me a heavy blow; I was thrown out of the synagogue as an apostate.

I was so accustomed to reading the Bible as I had been taught by generations of interpreters that for me to question the traditional interpretations was tantamount to questioning the Word of God itself. The tendency, on my part, was to identify what Scripture said with what I had been taught. This identification was one of the main obstacles that I encountered in trying to liberate the Bible from its

traditions. In my early ministry, I confused a tradition of explanation with the text itself. I had to learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what had been handed down to me.<sup>[5]</sup> When I was about sixteen years old, the “faith of the fathers” became the watchword of orthodoxy for me. Their interpretation became normative and was passed on as authoritative. For me, the Christian Scriptures had been turned into another law, a law that was more stringent and more damning than even the first Law.

One of the most difficult obstacles in my pilgrimage of faith was to approach the text without my strong personal biases.<sup>[6]</sup> I studied the Bible with “colored glasses,” which led to distortion. I tended to give preconceived beliefs the same authority that I gave to the Bible. In other words, my preconceived authority was equal to that of the Scriptures. My own personal journey of faith, with the ghosts of the past, made it very difficult for me to view the Scriptures without prejudice. My understanding and interpretation made it difficult to sift out the truths of God in dealing with the text. I allowed the context of my culture to control the text of the Bible. It became necessary for me to exercise a self-critical stance toward the tendency to impose my own agenda upon the interpretation of Scripture. I am still conscious of how difficult it is to bracket out a person’s cultural heritage in interpreting the ancient text.

Hopefully, this record of my own personal journey, with its struggles and heartaches will give others encouragement to reexamine their own traditions in the light of the context of Scripture. One should never forget that one’s own journey occurs within a vast architecture of preunderstanding – no thinking takes place in a vacuum.

### **We Speak Where the Bible Speaks**

As a part of my former training, I was taught “to speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent.” This slogan is still cited by many well-meaning Christians to justify their separation from other believers. On the surface, this cliché appears to express that which every Christian strives toward. The “catch phrase” sounded excellent and still has a ring of truth. But, there is a problem in quoting this group of words – no one can adhere perfectly to this catchy construction. First of all, there is a difference between speaking *as* the Bible speaks and speaking *where* the Bible speaks.

One may cite Scripture as Satan did in his encounter with Jesus, but, as Satan, not necessarily speak *as* the Bible speaks. Even though Satan quoted Scripture, he did not interpret Scripture in light of its context. It took me a long time to learn this basic rule. To interpret any text faithfully, the interpreter must endeavor to transfer himself from the present era to the historical situation of the author, look through his eyes, observe his surroundings, feel with his heart, and catch his emotions if he or she wishes to accurately apply the Word of God to the twentieth century church. This means that the interpreter must guard himself or herself carefully against transferring the authors of the first century to the twentieth and, then, interpreting their words in the light of his or her own twentieth century understanding.

### **Contextual Interpretation**

The first step in explaining Scripture is to read the text. To fathom a passage involves the immediate context, the remote context, and the larger context. The *immediate context* includes verses preceding and following the reference that one is studying. On the other hand, the *remote context* may take in the entire book in which the text is found. Also, the *larger context* may embrace the whole of God’s written revelation. This understanding of contexts helps to determine the meaning or meanings that one attaches to any distinct phrase. Otherwise, the interpreter may impose conjectured convictions on a text without due reflection upon what the author says. Without a conception of a context, a person’s particular context tends to shape his or her understanding and interpretation of the message.

Merely reciting Scriptures that draw attention to certain party dogmas is not sufficient to determine the meaning of the text. No one denies the truth of passages often enumerated to maintain the status quo, but one may deny the conclusions often reached by certain individuals. Every Scripture citation is the Word of God, but one must not equate one’s interpretation with the Word itself. Remember that

the context is the determining factor in trying to arrive at a correct insight. One must not employ Holy Scripture in a way the Holy Spirit did not employ them. Leroy Garrett points out, with justification, that

People tire of our equating our understanding of the word of God with the word of God itself. This is to say that we must distinguish between revelation and interpretation. Revelation is what God has given us in scripture. Interpretation is what we conclude the scriptures to mean. One is divine, the other human. <sup>[7]</sup>

“Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent” became the battle cry for the birth of the Reformation movement initiated by Thomas and Alexander Campbell. This slogan became the impetus for a movement that resulted in three distinctive bodies: (1) Churches of Christ, (2) Christian Churches, and (3) Disciples of Christ. All three bodies subpoena this cliché to call attention to their reliance upon the Bible and the Bible alone for their faith and practice. Even though all three movements rely upon the same motto, none can agree upon the exact blueprint or exact pattern supposedly set forth in the New Testament. These ecclesiastical organizations cannot agree over the scripturalness of missionary societies, Bible colleges, located preachers, orphan homes, etc. These groups, as a whole, cannot agree upon a corporate worship pattern to be observed in the so-called worship service; For example, they cannot agree on whether to have or not have Sunday school, individual cups or one common cup, instrumental music or vocal singing only, wine only or grape juice only, etc. <sup>[8]</sup>

### Re-evaluation of My Studies

What caused me to re-evaluate my understanding of the Scriptures? Approximately forty years ago, Ervin Waters suggested that I read a book on biblical hermeneutics by Dungan, <sup>[9]</sup> which I did. Later, I read another monumental study in this same field by Milton S. Terry. <sup>[10]</sup> Both of these writers had a profound influence on the re-evaluation of my cherished beliefs. Waters also introduced me to *Christianity Restored* by Alexander Campbell and to Robert Milligan’s book on the *Scheme of Redemption*. In addition to these works, he sent me five books by the famous Greek scholar from Moody Institute, Kenneth Wuest, to assist in my spiritual growth. Prior to this time, I don’t ever remember reading any book or books except debate books and sermon outlines. The writings of these authors contributed to leading me out of my sectarian spirit.

Soon after this exposure to the science of interpretation (in the early sixties and early seventies), I started reading the writings of Thomas and Alexander Campbell, M. S. Whitehead, <sup>[11]</sup> Carl Ketcherside, Leroy Garrett, and F. L. Lemley. <sup>[12]</sup> These men sought to recapture the original intent of the Word of God. They called upon Christians to reexamine their long-cherished traditions. They addressed the subject of fellowship with its ramifications upon Christian unity; they also tried to recapture the original meaning of the word *ekklesia* and its implications toward a broader fellowship of believers; they questioned the practice of rebaptism and its devastating effect upon the Christian community for unity; they investigated the distinction between gospel and doctrine and its implications upon one’s understanding of fellowship. What they wrote shocked me to the point that initially I thought they were all a little nuts.

But as I read more and more of their writings, I began to reinvestigate my earlier teachings. As a result of their writings, I had to re-evaluate many of my former convictions. For example, I had to reflect upon the original meaning of the word “church” (*ekklesia*), the concept of limited knowledge about God’s Word as the norm within the church, the meaning of the word “Gospel” as being “good news,” the correct use of the word “doctrine” as employed in the New Testament, rethink the roots or causes of divisions within the body of Christ, and to confront squarely the question of so-called “brothers in error.”

As a result of my in-depth studies, I had to re-think my position of many doctrinal conclusions. For the first time in my life I went to the Bible to see what it taught rather than to prove what I already believed. I learned that one must transfer himself mentally into the minds

of the first century authors and stand upon their threshold and look through their eyes and see things as they saw them, rather than transfer the writers of the first century to the twentieth century and, then, interpret their words in the light of our present day understanding.<sup>[13]</sup>

### Assemblies of the Anointed One

One of the most difficult questions that confronted me in my early years of ministry had to do with the so-called name of the church. My spiritual teacher taught me that one could read about the “Churches of Christ” in the Bible—and you could in the KJV and many other translations. I could quote Romans 16:16 by memory. From this kind of literal citation of Scripture, without regards to the context, developed my theology about the name of the church, which just happens to be the “Church of Christ” that came out of the Stone/Campbell movement. We reasoned like this: Where in the Bible do you read of a Baptist Church or a Methodist Church or a Presbyterian Church? One can read about the Church of Christ Church in Romans 16:16, but one cannot read about the others. On the surface, the argument appeared to have some validity, but the dilemma in this kind of dialectic was that Christ was not our Lord’s name, but rather, his official appellation (title). Matthew (1:21) tells us that his name was Jesus.

After having spent considerable hours in the science of biblical interpretation, I resolved to go to Romans to see what it said, rather than to prove what I already believed. After studying Romans 16:16, I discovered that the name *Christ* is simply the transliteration of the Greek word *Christos*, which is equivalent to the Hebrew word *Messiah*.<sup>[14]</sup> Christ was a designation that God gave to prophets, priests and kings. Prophets were “christ,” priests were “christ,” and kings were “christ,” but Jesus was not just one christ among many christs; He was the Christ, that is, the Anointed One of God. According to the Greek text, what did Paul write in Romans 16:16? Since the word *christ* means “anointed,” and since the word *church* means “assembly,” then, the correct translation is: the assemblies of the Anointed One salutes you.” This verse is simply referring to the various assemblies as belonging to the Anointed One of God.

The question that confronts every Christian, as it did me, is: does Paul designate the denominational Churches of Christ in Romans 16:16 as the Churches of Christ today? In the beginning of my ministry, I was taught that the Churches of Christ that Paul addressed in Romans 16:16 were the one-cup and non-Sunday churches that I was associated with. The true Church of Christ had to do with my particular fellowship, no one else, all others were digressive. I never questioned the truthfulness of this line of reasoning. However, years later, I did speculate about where the Church of Christ was when Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of the castle in Wittenberg in 1517. Also, I wondered where the Church of Christ was when Pope Urban II launched the first Christian crusade in 1095 AD.<sup>[15]</sup>

The truth of the matter is, there was no such ecclesiastical organization known as the Church of Christ as a distinct denominational body. Now, it is true that Christ’s church was in existence, but not the denominational Church of Christ; it did not exist.<sup>[16]</sup> This particular group did not come along until the time of Alexander Campbell in the 1800’s. In the early part of my ministry, I rejected the concept that the Church of Christ is a denomination, but this was not the case with its founder, Alexander Campbell. As early as 1840, Campbell wrote a letter to a Baptist scholar, Andrew Broaddus, whom he called brother, about his concern over the written history of the Reformation Movement:

Whenever the history of this effort at reformation shall have been faithfully written, it will appear, we think, bright as the sun, that our career has been marked with a spirit of forbearance, moderation, and love of union with an unequivocal desire for preserving the integrity, harmony, and co-operation of all who teach one faith, one Lord, and one immersion. In confirmation of this fact I am happy to add that no Baptist of good character for piety and morality, has ever been, because of a diverse theory or opinion, excluded from our communion or communities. . . . We, as a denomination, are as desirous as ever to unite and co-operate with all Christians on the broad and vital principles of the New and everlasting Covenant (emphasis mine).<sup>[17]</sup>

We, in the Stone/Campbell movement, made the mistake of identifying the “church” with the Church of Christ that came out of the nineteenth century reformation movement initiated by the Campbells and Stone, thereby excluding all others from belonging to Jesus. The

truth of the matter is, there is only one church. There is no such thing as a Baptist Church, a Methodist Church, a Presbyterian Church, or a Church of Christ Church; there is only one church, and that one church consists of all those who have put their faith in Jesus as redeemer.

Carl Ketcherside uses the following pregnant words to describe the current dilemma of the church of Christ today.

I do not believe there is any such thing as either “The Christian Church” or “The church of Christ.” There are religious parties designated by these titles, but there is only one church. There never was but one. There will never be another. “The Christian Church” does not have all of the Christians in it, and “The Church of Christ” is not the church of Christ. Both of these parties which have been allowed to grow out of an American restoration movement launched by some Presbyterian minister in the early part of the nineteenth century.<sup>[18]</sup>

This article by Ketcherside was the beginning of my re-evaluation of the nature of God’s church. Thus far, I have continuously employed the term “church” to describe the people of God. As stated above, I had a rude awakening when I discovered that our English word “church” was not an accurate translation of the Greek Word “ekklesia” and that the word that Paul uses in Romans (16:16) merely meant an “assembly.” In other words, God’s assembly consists of those that put their faith in Jesus as God’s Anointed One. As stated above, there is no such thing as a Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, or a Church of Christ church; there is only one “ekklesia,” and that body includes all believers. It is significant that the word *ekklesia* appears eighty-one times in the Greek Old Testament (LXX), but it is never translated “church” in our English translations.<sup>[19]</sup> Garrett says it best: “It is as a family that we must come to see the church. It is not an institution or organization, but a family community of brother and sisters.”<sup>[20]</sup> Thomas Campbell, in 1809, penned the following words in his Declaration and Address:

Prop. I. That the church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else; as none else can be truly and properly called Christians.<sup>[21]</sup>

At the time Thomas Campbell wrote these words, there was no such thing as the Church of Christ Church. In fact, Campbell was Presbyterian at the time. For him the church of Christ consisted of all who put their faith in Jesus as Lord. His objective in writing this Declaration and Address was to set forth biblical principles upon which fellowship is founded, not the traditions of men. He admitted that the church of Christ in his day comprised people from all denominations. He wrote in his second proposition the following succinct statement about the divisions existing in his day:

2. That although the Church of Christ upon earth must necessarily exist in particular and distinct societies locally separate one from another, yet there ought to be no schisms, no uncharitable divisions among them. They ought to receive each other as Christ Jesus hath also received them, to the glory of God. And for this purpose they ought all to walk by the same rule, to mind and speak the same thing; and to be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment.<sup>[22]</sup>

**Proposition Two** set the stage for his comments on “inferences and deductions” from Scripture. Even today, it is not uncommon for Christians to try to force agreement based upon their inferences and deductions from the Word of God. This practice of forcing conformity as a condition of fellowship was also prevalent in my early ministry – some preachers carried debate propositions with them in their coat pockets, ready to debate at the drop of a hat—differences existed on every street corner. Thomas Campbell captured my attention when he forcefully dealt with the enforcement, on the part of some, of “inferences and deductions” as essential to Christian fellowship. Thus, I had to deal with his comments in light of Scripture. **Proposition Six** reads:

6. That although inferences and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God’s holy word, yet are they not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so; for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power and veracity of God. Therefore, no such deductions can be made terms of communion, but do properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the Church. Hence, it is evident that no such deductions or inferential truths ought to have any place in the Church’s confession.<sup>[23]</sup>

## Fellowship and Agreement

Through my studies I came to understand that no individual possesses absolute knowledge.<sup>[24]</sup> Since all Christians possess limited knowledge, then, do we come into communion by agreement upon all Scripture? Common sense tells us that we do not! Fellowship is not a fruit of agreement but agreement is a fruit of fellowship.<sup>[25]</sup> As a result of this revelation, I had to wrestle with the following question: If one does not enjoy flawless insight into the Scriptures, does God condemn one to an eternal burning hell? The answer to this question is an unqualified NO!

What is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit concerning this question? The apostle Paul goes right to the heart of the issue when he writes: "We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God" (1 Corinthians 8:1-3).<sup>[26]</sup> Again, Paul writes, "Accept him whose faith is weak . . . who are you to judge someone else's servant? . . . Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (Romans 14:1a, 4a, 5b). Paul is saying that believers ought not to denounce one another as dishonest guides when they do not dot every "i" and cross every "t" in the same way. Tolerance toward differences is the subject of Paul's admonition for unity, not absolute conformity in belief with other believers. But someone may ask, "Are we in fellowship with error?" No, we are in fellowship with fellows. The question is often asked, "Are you in fellowship with brothers in error?" My answer is yes, because this is the only kind of brothers that I know about.<sup>[27]</sup> For some reason, my inconsistencies never became visible to me until the early seventies that I was one of those brothers in error.<sup>[28]</sup>

How does one deal with truth and error in the church? This question confronted me head on. I finally came to the conclusion that all truth is true, but not all truth is essential to one's salvation; all error is error, but not all error will condemn one's soul. Absolute freedom from error is not a condition of salvation else all men would be damned.<sup>[29]</sup> One is saved not by attainment to a certain degree of knowledge, but by faith in Christ Jesus. All truth is essential to one's well-being, but some truth is essential to one's being. For example, let us consider the physical body for an analogy. All the members of one's body are for his or her well being, but if one loses a leg, an arm, or a finger, one would be only handicapped or incapacitated. But if, on the other hand, one loses his or her head, one would be dead. The same analogy may be applied to Jesus. One may be wrong about some doctrinal point(s) and still be saved, but if one is wrong about Jesus, one can be lost. On this particular point, Campbell has captured this truth and is well worth citing:

The Apostle says, 'There is one body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one immersion, one God and Father of all.' But nowhere is it said in the sacred book, There is one opinion. If, however, unity of opinion were desirable, to attain it, we must give the greatest liberty of opinion; for though once theory with us, it is now matter of experience, that the more stress is laid upon unity of opinion, the less of it, and the more division; and the less regard paid to it, the less emphasis laid upon it, the more we will have of it. This is founded in a law of the human mind, on which it is unseasonable and unnecessary to expatiate.<sup>[30]</sup>

In the early phases of my ministry, I did not distinguish between fellowship and agreement. I had never fathomed the idea that fellowship does not come as a result of our agreement upon matters of opinion and interpretation, but our ability to reach agreement upon these things may come as a result of our fellowship. We are not one in opinion; we are one in Christ. It is not our study, our acquisition of knowledge, our learning of the law, or our ability as teacher or expounder of God's Word that makes us children of God. We become children by procreation, not education. Ketcherside does well to remind us that

Jesus died for persons and not for their opinions or ideas, right or wrong, and those for whom he died must be more important to us than anything for which he did not die. . . . As God accepted us in our weakness, with mistaken ideas, warped views and unhealthful attitudes, so we must accept each other in the same state or condition. We must not make the kingdom of heaven to consist of our convictions, attitudes or opinions, but of citizens who must be tolerant of each other in such matters, else there can be no kingdom of heaven at all.<sup>[31]</sup>

## **Gospel and Doctrine**

Next, we need to distinguish between *Gospel* and *doctrine*, a distinction drawn by the writers of the new covenant Scriptures – a distinction that I did not make in the olden days of my ministry. At a later date, I did come to realize that there is as much difference between the Gospel of Christ and the apostolic doctrine as there is between the sperm from which a child is begotten and the food that he eats after he is born. Through my reexamination of Gospel and doctrine, I came to understand that Paul knew the difference between the seed from which life came and the daily bread upon which the children fed. He knew the difference between Gospel and doctrine and between faith and knowledge. He knew that the Gospel brought us into being while the doctrine was essential to our growth and well being, and he did not make a test of fellowship out of spiritual digestion. Ketcherside brought this point home to me, when he wrote: “Those who confuse chastisement of a child with begetting and cannot distinguish between correction and conception are in a sad predicament.”<sup>[32]</sup>

In my early preaching I looked upon the Gospel as being composed of twenty-seven books. But, after investigating the word “Gospel,” I discovered that the Gospel may be epitomized in three saving facts: namely, the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). The Holy Spirit does not identify the Gospel as everything recorded in the Bible. The fellowship of believers with whom I associated did not differentiate between Gospel and doctrine. Therefore, for one to disagree on doctrine was tantamount to preaching another Gospel, for which a curse must be pronounced on the perpetrator. It is true that one must be correct concerning the Gospel, but an individual does not have to be accurate on every doctrinal teaching in the Scriptures to be saved—as I had previously been taught and advocated for several years. But in this philosophy, we were not always consistent. We made allowances for other differences, but we did not make concession for our ritualistic pattern of “five acts of worship” on Sunday morning.<sup>[33]</sup>

It appeared, so it seemed to me, that God made a separation between “Gospel” and “teaching.” As stated above, there is as much difference between the Gospel of Christ and the apostolic doctrine as there is between the sperm from which a child is begotten and the food that he eats after he is born.<sup>[34]</sup> The purpose of the gospel is to enlist men into the army of Christ; the doctrine (teaching) constitutes a manual of arms and a book of discipline to develop the soldiers into a fighting force. I confused chastisement of a child with begetting and did not distinguish between correction and conception. I discovered that it is the Holy Spirit that inducts a subject into the one body, not precise knowledge of the five acts of worship, as we commonly called them. Every sincere baptized believer is brought into the fellowship of the saints in spite of his or her inadequate understanding of God’s Word.

## **Fellowship and Endorsement**

Having arrived at a better comprehension of “Gospel and doctrine,” I turned my attention to the subject of endorsement. In my early years of preaching and teaching, I did not differentiate between “fellowship and endorsement,” which was one of the major “hang ups” in the brotherhood then, as well as of today (1998). I labored under the impression that to have fellowship with someone with whom I disagreed was to endorse whatever the other person believed.

After much soul searching, I finally came to the judgement that fellowship and endorsement could not possibly be the same. For example, who would be so naïve to give credence to the idea that God sanctions all things we perform, believe, or voice. Surely no one would hold to such a preposterous notion. Yet, we all maintain that we are in fellowship with God, in spite of our shortcomings in our lives and beliefs. We don’t think this lack of knowledge or failure in perfection affects our relationship with God—it just applies to other people. I had to struggle with the question: does fellowship with God indicate that God endorses everything we believe, do, and say? Surely, the answer is NO! For one to be in fellowship with God does not indicate that God puts his signature to the whole shebang of what we believe,

perform, or pronounce. Since this is so, then, why can we not be in fellowship with one another and not necessarily endorse the many things that the other person gives approval to or practices?<sup>[35]</sup> Ketcherside drew my attention to the fact that

The fellowship of the new covenant is not based upon unanimity of opinion, interpretation, or even understanding of scriptural doctrine. It does not imply nor indicate endorsement of the position of one with whom we may differ. Fellowship is one thing; endorsement of a position taken by another is a wholly different thing. Fellowship of Christ, and in Christ, is a state or condition into which we are called by God through the gospel; endorsement of an interpretation or idea of one in or out of that fellowship is a rational act of our own minds.<sup>[36]</sup>

In my travel of faith, I came to grasp that one cannot make togetherness, or fellowship, dependent upon education. What I came to understand about fellowship later in my ministry, Alexander Campbell wrote about in 1830. Campbell also faced the same kind of know-it-all attitude in the nineteenth century that I manifested in my earlier training. He said it best when he wrote:

It is cruel to excommunicate a man because of the imbecility of his intellect. We have been censured long and often for laying too much stress upon the assent of the understanding; but those who have most acrimoniously censured us, have laid much more stress upon the assent of the mind, than we have ever done. We never did, at any time, exclude a man from the kingdom of God for a mere imbecility of intellect; or in other words, because he could not assent to our opinions. All sects are doing, or have done this.<sup>[37]</sup>

My postulation of perfect knowledge of every detail of God's Word required inerrancy and infallibility, which I did not possess. This demand of perfection in knowledge, on my part, required that one be God. Are we excluding men from the kingdom of God for mere feeble-mindedness of intellect? In my earlier ministry, I excluded every person from God's kingdom that did not agree with our group. But thank God, I came to understand, through other godly men, a clearer perception of what Christianity is all about. It is a popular error to suppose that what I believe is the Word of God, but what you believe is not. In seeking to call attention to neglected truths, repetition is unavoidable. Leroy Garrett is perfectly right when he insists that

People tire of our equating our understanding of the word of God with the word of God itself. This is to say that we must distinguish between revelation and interpretation. Revelation is what God has given us in scripture. Interpretation is what we conclude the scriptures to mean. One is divine, the other human.<sup>[38]</sup>

### Unity in Diversity

In the beginning of my spiritual journey, I denied unity in diversity. Unity in conformity was the battle cry. If one did not conform to the traditions of the church, he or she faced expulsion, which is what ultimately happened to me. It never once occurred to me that Christians can no more all think alike than they can all look alike. This is just plain common-sense interpretation. A more excellent way of expressing the truthfulness of this philosophy is Ketcherside's comments about observation:

But we learn from observation, experience and the sacred scriptures, that we do not all have the same degree of knowledge. God has made us all to differ in the intellectual realm as we do in the physical. We can no more all think alike than we can all look alike. No two of us upon earth attain to the same identical degree of knowledge about everything at the same moment. . . . Any attempt to secure unity upon basis of uniformity of knowledge or conformity in deductive or inferential process (e.g., doctrinal interpretation) is doomed before it begins.<sup>[39]</sup>

This article by Ketcherside helped to crystallize my thinking in this area of "uniformity of knowledge." I saw division on every street corner. We were divided into approximately twenty-five warring factions. Each was claiming to be the "true" Church of Christ. In fact, the congregation that I helped to establish in Montgomery, Alabama had a sign that read, "The loyal Church meets here."<sup>[40]</sup> We had set up a system by which fellowship is conditioned upon equality of knowledge, and, as a result, we created a state in which strife, division, and confusion prevailed. This fellowship of believers created an atmosphere in which no one dared to express an original thought. If one dared to think, one would be sent to the chopping block—agree with the status quo or face excommunication. This belief cut us off from every Christian that did not conform to our way of thinking. We were not in fellowship, so we thought, with "wine only" brethren,<sup>[41]</sup> with

“bread breaking” brethren, with “individual cups” brethren, with “Sunday school” brethren, with “instrumental music” brethren, and so on.

[42]

For some reason, it never occurred to us that in the primitive community there were *diversity* of gifts (1 Corinthians 12:4-6), a *diversity* of functions (Romans 12:4-5), a *diversity* in understanding (1 Corinthians 3:1; 8:1-13; Romans 14:1—15:1-7), a *diversity* in knowledge (1 Corinthians 8:2), a diversity in customs (1 Corinthians 9:19-23; 10:31-33), and a *diversity* in opinions (Romans 14). The writings of Thomas and Alexander Campbell helped to call attention to diversity in the Christian community. I cite Alexander Campbell once more because of his unique insight into the human predicament. Since our minds are leavened by the traditions of the church that prevail in Christendom, by which vital truths of Christianity are secretly undermined or openly denied, we need to reflect upon the growth in the spiritual life of every believer. Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) drew attention to the fact that

Amongst Christians there is now, as there was at the beginning, a very great diversity in the knowledge of the Christian institution. There are babes, children, young men, and fathers in Christ now, as well as in the days of the Apostle John. This, from the natural gifts of God, from the diversities of age, education, and circumstances, is unavoidable. And would it not be just as rational and as scriptural to excommunicate one another, because our knowledge is less or greater than any fixed measure, as for differences of opinion on matters of speculation?

Indeed, in most cases where proscription and exclusions now occur in this country, the excluded are the most intelligent members of the society; and although no community will accuse a man because he knows more of his Bible than his brethren, and on this account exclude him from their communion; yet this, it is manifest, rather than heresy, (of which, however, for consistency's sake, he must be accused,) is, in truth, the real cause of separation.

If God has bestowed better gifts or better opportunities on one man than another, by which he has attained more knowledge, instead of thanking God for his kindness to the community, they beg God to take him away; and if he will not be so unkind, they will at length put him from among them under the charge of heresy. In most instances the greatest error of which a brother can be guilty, is to study his bible more than his companions—or, at least, to surpass them in his knowledge of the mystery of Christ. [43]

### Believers in Error

In my pilgrimage of faith, I became aware that in Christ Jesus all believers are in error on many doctrinal points. Through common-sense interpretation, I came to the realization that absolute freedom from error in all doctrinal problems is not a condition of salvation, else all men would be damned. We are not saved by attainment to an unmistakable degree of knowledge but by faith in Christ Jesus. I came to realize that the only brethren we have are brethren in error. In my earlier phases of changing, Christians often asked me if I were in fellowship with error? To this I answered no! I am in fellowship with people, not error. Ketcherside expressed the basic problem well in his discussion of “Another Gospel.”

Those we were in Christ in the days of the apostles were in error on many points. They were mistaken about a lot of things but they were not charged with ‘preaching another gospel.’ Freedom from error is not a condition of salvation else all men would be damned. We are not saved by attainment to a certain degree of knowledge but by faith in Christ Jesus. It is by belief of facts related to him, and not by grasp of abstract truth, that we are justified before God. Certainly it is not by performance of meritorious deeds nor by legalistic conformity. When we postulate a program of justification by knowledge we hang ourselves on the gallows we have constructed to rid ourselves of others, unless we are prepared to make ourselves even more ridiculous by affirming that we know as much as God. [44]

Through my studies, I came to the realization that one must make a separation between “one faith” and “one opinion.” It is not “What do you believe?”—the eager and sole inquiry of modern religious parties—but rather, “In whom do you believe?” This was the question addressed by Christ to one who sought to know the truth: “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” (John 9:35). Campbell captures this truth when he writes:

But the grandeur, sublimity, and beauty of the foundation of hope, and of ecclesiastical or social union, established by the author and founder of Christianity, consisted in this, that THE BELIEF OF ONE FACT, and that upon the best evidence in the world, is all that is requisite, as far as faith goes, to salvation. The belief of ONE FACT, and submission to ONE INSTITUTION expressive of it, is all that is required of Heaven to admission into the church. [45]

## Conclusion

It was and is my firm conviction that most of the ardent laborers in every faction are striving to build up a narrow, bigoted, exclusive party of conformity, and the brethren have brainwashed themselves into thinking that the party of their allegiance is the kingdom of God over which our Lord reigns in an exclusive sense. How many times have we heard the phrase, “We are the loyal church”? Each of these loyal churches has its own unwritten creed, its own clerical domination, its own coercion, and its own compulsion of membership by threat and mental force. The church of Christ has entangled and enslaved the soul.

In concluding my remarks about my growth and travel in “My Pilgrimage of Faith,” I remind each reader that whenever individuals demand a program of justification by knowledge, then, they hang themselves on the gallows they have constructed to rid themselves of others, unless they are prepared to make themselves even more foolish by affirming that they know as much as God. My prayer is that you, the reader, will weigh carefully the concepts presented in this article so that you will not make the same pit falls that I made in the earlier part of my spiritual voyage.

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<sup>[1]</sup> All Scripture citations are from the NIV, unless stated otherwise.

<sup>[2]</sup> I started my public ministry on January 21, 1951 in LaGrange, Georgia under the leadership of E.H. Miller, my uncle.

<sup>[3]</sup> This was not intentional on the part of the one who taught me. This godly man devoted his whole life to God with immense zeal. I still thank God for his instilling into me a belief in the trustworthiness of the Scriptures as the inspired Word of God. He was a child of his culture, as we all are. He taught me as he himself had been taught. Because of different circumstances in life, I was exposed to other writers who helped me to develop principles of interpretation that he had not been exposed to.

<sup>[4]</sup> My first sermon was delivered at the chapel service of Montgomery Bible College, now Faulkner University, Montgomery, Alabama in 1950 (I do not remember the exact date), but, on January 21, 1951, I delivered this same sermon at the Murphy Ave. Church of Christ in LaGrange, Georgia.

<sup>[5]</sup> When one exercises this prerogative of discernment, one must be prepared for the wrath of the ecclesiastical party and its preachers to wreak havoc on your body and mind. In my own personal journey of faith, I was thrown out of the Synagogue overnight. It was as if I no longer existed. Letters were sent out to alert brethren that I was no longer “sound” in the faith, even though I was still a part of the one-cup and non-Sunday school faction.

<sup>[6]</sup> Because of my earlier training, I found it difficult to deal with a number of Scriptures in context. I struggled to find answers in harmony with the whole of God’s Word. Since this article is about my pilgrimage of faith, it is necessary that I quote from those who helped me the most in my study of the Scriptures. I am thankful to M. S. Whitehead for the many papers that he mailed me concerning many of the issues that I struggled with for such a long, long time. I am also grateful to Whitehead for introducing me to the writings of Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett. But even prior to the introduction to these various authors, I was very fortunate to have some guidance from Ervin Waters in the field of hermeneutics (science of interpretation). As a result of his assistance, I became aware of many problems in my handling of the Scriptures. The books recommended by Waters prepared me to digest the writing of M. S. Whitehead, Carl Ketcherside, Leroy Garrett, F.L. Lemley, and Alexander Campbell. I met Whitehead for the first time in the late fifties at the Lowery Church of Christ (one-cup and non-Sunday school), where I preached on a regular basis (at least once a month), while he was attending a gospel meeting conducted by J. D. Philips (1904-1981).

<sup>[7]</sup> Leroy Garrett, “It Means What It Says,” in *Restoration Review* 17, no. 4 (April 1975): 69.

<sup>[8]</sup> For a detailed explanation of this Subject, see <http://www.freedominchrist.net> under the caption Declaration and Address and the subheading Where The Scriptures Speak: An Historical Investigation and Interpretation. This article is a detailed study of this subject (forth coming).

<sup>[9]</sup> D. R. Dungan, *Hermeneutics* (Delight, Arkansas: Gospel Light Publishing Co, n.d.).

<sup>[10]</sup> Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments*, reprint, nd (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988).

<sup>[11]</sup> M. S. Whitehead, a few years after our meeting in Lowery, placed membership with the Vonora Ave. Church of Christ in Montgomery, AL. Vonora Ave is still a one-cup and non Sunday school church. Even though he met with the one-cup group, he did not believe that the use of individual cups was sinful.

<sup>[12]</sup> I quote extensively from the writings of Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Carl Ketcherside, and Leroy Garrett in My Pilgrimage of Faith. Why? It is simply that these men are the writers whom I started reading after my initial studies in the field of hermeneutics. Immediately, after reading their books, I recognized the same principles in their literature that I had read from Dungan, Terry and Berkhof’s works on Hermeneutics.

<sup>[13]</sup> L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation: Sacred Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), 115.

<sup>[14]</sup> See Carl Ketcherside, “The Name of the Bride,” *Mission Messenger* 19, no. 4 (April 1957): 9-10.

<sup>[15]</sup> I am indebted to Leroy Garrett for calling attention to the origin of the Church of Christ Church with his article, “Is August 17, 1889 the Birthday of the Church of Christ?” in *Restoration Review* 17, no. 1 (January 1975): 6-9.

<sup>[16]</sup> Many Christians object to the word denominations as applicable to the Church of Christ, for many within the Churches of Christ it is called the Lord's church to distinguish it from other denominations. For an excellent analysis of the meaning of the word "denomination," see Carl Ketcherside, "The Name Pattern," *Mission Messenger* 32, no. 3 (August 1970): 113 where he says,

The very word denominate, from the Latin *de* and *nominare*, to call by a name, means, "to give a name to; designate by a name or title; to call by a distinctive name or designation." Any group which selects and appropriates to itself a specific name, title or brand, is a denomination, whether the title it selects is from words found in the bible, or composed of words not even mentioned in the sacred volume. . . . The *ekklesia* of God had no specific name in its inception. The saints were corporately designated only by simple nouns. All of these describe a relationship. Not a one was used as an exclusive title.

<sup>[17]</sup> Alexander Campbell, "The Editor's Response to Mr. Broadus," *Millennial Harbinger*, New Series, 4, no. XII (December 1840): 556.

<sup>[18]</sup> Carl Ketcherside, "Fear and Suspicion," in *Mission Messenger* 25, no. 2 (February 1963): 27.

<sup>[19]</sup> Carl Ketcherside, "The Name of the Bride," *Mission Messenger* 12, no. 4 (April 1957): 9 where he says:

The title "Church of Christ" as used by a large segment of believers today is employed in a denominational sense, just as the terms Baptist Church, Methodist Church, Christian Church, etc. This is very difficult for many to see, for they have been taught that their salvation depends upon the name "The Church of Christ" although that expression is not once found in the sacred scripture. . . . The idea that a wife should wear her husband's name as he means it, is not a scriptural one. No married woman in Bible times was ever called by her husband's name. That practice is a fairly modern one and by no means universal even now. . . . The word "church" is not a name at all. It is a common noun like "house" or "wife." . . . His name was Jesus, and that is what he was called at birth, but "God hath made that same Jesus . . . both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). Christ is no more his name than is the word "Lord." The word "Christ" is merely the Greek form of the Hebrew "Messiah." It isn't a name at all: it is an office which God made him to occupy.

I read this article in July 1964. This essay caused me to rethink my position on the name of the church. At this time I was still associated with the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement. In fact, I did not leave that movement until the early seventies. Even though all my so-called gospel meetings and preaching engagements were cancelled, I continued in the movement until about 1972 or early 1973.

<sup>[20]</sup> Leroy Garrett, "The Catholicity of the Church," *Restoration Review* 15, no. 3 (March 1973): 45.

<sup>[21]</sup> Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address* (St. Louis, Missouri: Mission Messenger, 1975, reprint), 44 [page numbers are from the reprint edition].

<sup>[22]</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-45.

<sup>[23]</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>[24]</sup> This statement does not deny that God's Word is absolute, but rather, that our knowledge of God's Word is relative. This relativity of knowledge is one of the reasons that Paul rebuked the Corinthians and the Romans for not making allowances for differences. In the dawning of my ministry, I violated the principles laid down by Paul. I did not make a distinction between my interpretation of God's Word and the Word itself. In other words, I equated my interpretation with God's revelation. I do not know why this never occurred to me in my earlier ministry. In this perception, for lack of a better term, I was brain-dead.

<sup>[25]</sup> See Carl Ketcherside, "Thoughts on Fellowship," *Mission Messenger* 20, no. 2 (July 1958): 2.

<sup>[26]</sup> For a more detailed study of 1 Corinthians 8:1-3, see my treatise on False Prophets: Who Are They? This study is located under the caption, **Biblical Studies** (<http://www.freedominchrist.net>) and, then, under the subheading **Exegesis of Misapplied Scriptures**. In 1972, I remember very vividly my sharing the eighth chapter of 1 Corinthians with a relative of mine (he also was/is a preacher). There was utter rejection of what was stated. In fact, he even denied that that teaching was in the Bible. The amazing thing is that he had read that Scripture dozens of times, but, for some reason, it never registered with him as to what Paul was saying. The reason, perhaps, is that that Scripture did not coincide with his theology. It seems to me that the words of Jesus are very appropriate here: "He who has ears, let him hear" (Matthew 11:15).

<sup>[27]</sup> See Carl Ketcherside, "Fear and Suspicion," *Mission Messenger* 25, no. 2 (February 1963): 27.

<sup>[28]</sup> For an excellent treatment of the distinction between fellowship and endorsement, I highly recommend Carl Ketcherside, "Thoughts on Fellowship," *Mission Messenger* 20, no. 2 (February 1957): 3-6.

<sup>[29]</sup> See Carl Ketcherside, "Another Gospel," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 1 (January 1965): 7.

<sup>[30]</sup> Alexander Campbell, "To Mr. William Jones, of London, Letter IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 6, no. 3 (March 1835): 111-112.

<sup>[31]</sup> Carl Ketcherside, "Contrary to the Doctrine," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 3 (March 1965): 35-36.

<sup>[32]</sup> Carl Ketcherside, "Gospel and Doctrine," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 2 (February 1965): 23.

<sup>[33]</sup> For a more detailed study of the peculiarities of the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement, see a Brief History of the Origin of the One Cup and non-Sunday School Movement (Under **Biblical Studies**, then under **Lord's Supper**). For additional oddities on this Movement, see my article on Oddities in Pattern Theology under the caption **Biblical Studies**. (See [www.freedominchrist.net](http://www.freedominchrist.net) for these articles.).

<sup>[34]</sup> I am indebted to Carl Ketcherside for this perceptive insight.

<sup>[35]</sup> Carl Ketcherside wrote one of the most informative articles that I have read about fellowship and endorsement. In his article, "Reply to Brother Thomas," in *Mission Messenger* 25, no. 4 (April 1963): 51-59. I call attention to this perceptive essay on fellowship, because this response to Brother Thomas helped me to rethink the subject of biblical fellowship that is in keeping with the tenor of the Scriptures. This article is what I called common-sense interpretation.

<sup>[36]</sup> Carl Ketcherside, "Thoughts on Fellowship," in *Mission Messenger* 20, no. 2 (February 1957): 4.

<sup>[37]</sup> Alexander Campbell, "Millennium. – II," in *The Millennial Harbinger* 1 (5 April 1830): 122-123.

<sup>[38]</sup> Leroy Garrett, "What kind of a Book is the Bible? . . . 'It Means What It Says,'" *Restoration Review* 17, no. 4 (April 1975): 69.

<sup>[39]</sup> Carl Ketcherside, "Gospel and Doctrine," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 2 (February 1965): 17-18.

<sup>[40]</sup> This congregation was started in my mother's (Thelma Haygood) home on Madison Avenue (1952). This church still exists and is known as the Vonora Avenue Church of Christ. The congregation continues to advocate the use of the common cup and no Sunday school.

<sup>[41]</sup> Some Christians in the one-cup and non-Sunday school advocated the use of wine in the Lord's supper, not grape juice. As a result of this belief, the wine only would not fellowship the grape juice only and the grape juice only group would not fellowship the wine only group.

<sup>[42]</sup> For a fuller detail of this movement, see my article on "A Brief History of the One-Cup and Non-Sunday School Movement," under the caption: Lord's Supper, on Burdette's [www.freedominchrist.net](http://www.freedominchrist.net)

<sup>[43]</sup> Alexander Campbell, "Christian Union," in *Christianity Restored* (Rosemead, California: Old Paths Book Club, 1959), 127. I read this book in May, 1964.

<sup>[44]</sup> Carl Ketcherside, "Another Gospel," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 1 (January 1965): 6-7.

<sup>[45]</sup> Alexander Campbell, "The Foundation of Hope and of Christian Union," *The Christian Baptist* 1, no. 9 (April 1824): 177.